WHAT IS FAILURE?

"MOTHER," said Hester Fulton, "I have about decided that I'm a failure as far as trying to be a Christian is concerned. I try and try, but I don't seem to come anywhere near my ideals. I feel like giving the whole thing up."

"The danger with young people, Hester," said her mother, "is to set up absolute standards for themselves, and to call anything less failure. As you grow older you'll learn that failure is a relative thing. You young folks talk in superlatives most of the time. But life will weather down these jagged cliffs of judgment."

"But haven't I failed if I haven't reached my ideals?" Hester asked.

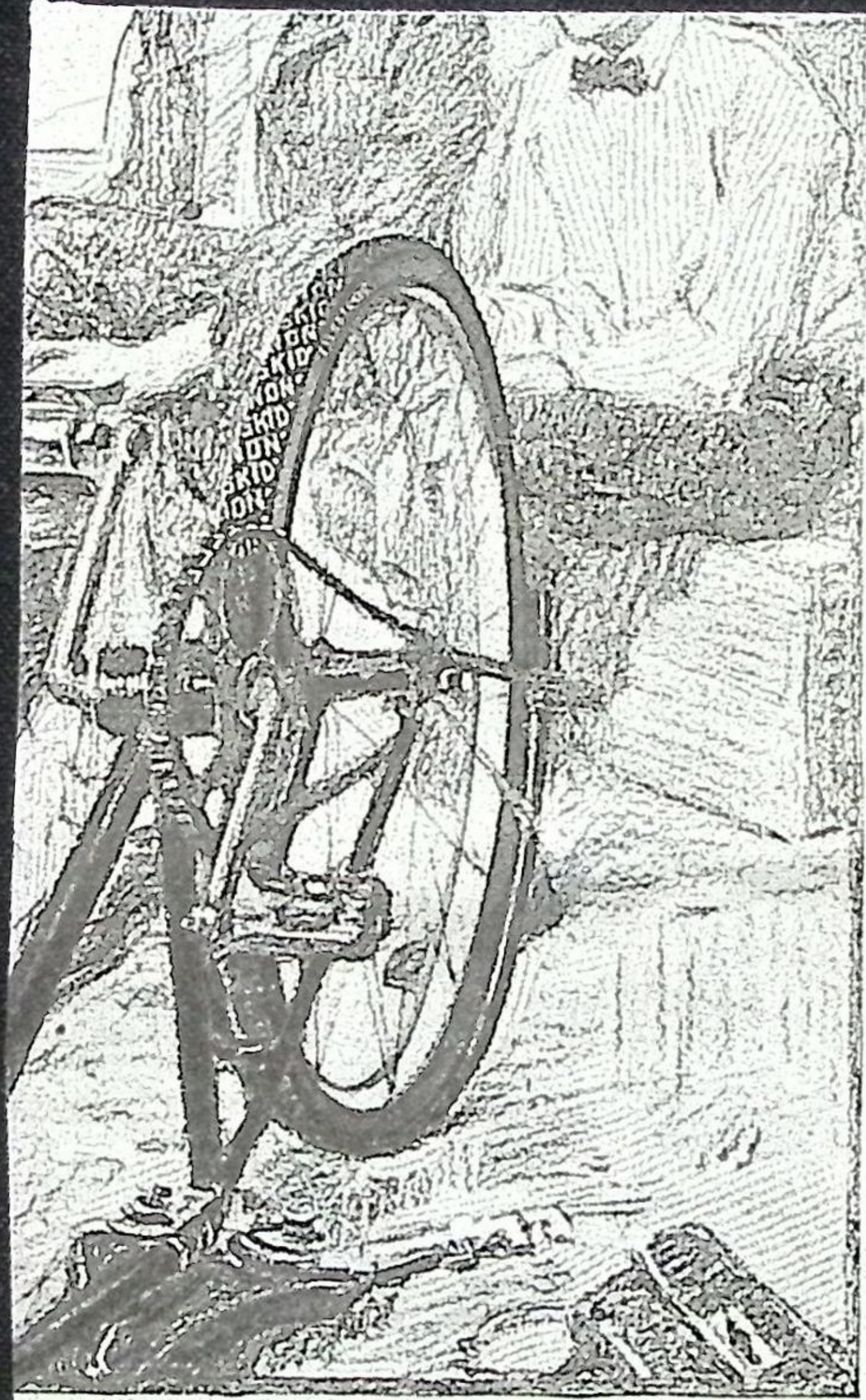
"Everyone who has ideals fails in that sense of the word," replied her mother. "But which is better, to set your ideals so low that you can easily reach them, or so high that, although you far outreach a low ideal, you do not attain the higher? You know the old saying, 'Not failure, but low aim, is crime.' It is always a sorrowful thing to see a person whose fortune is as big as his heart and whose dreams are always within reach of fulfillment. When a person has ideals that are never satisfied, he is facing an inevitable failure that really means success."

"Yes, but I don't get *done* what I want to do," replied Hester, "and surely that is failure."

"There again you are mistaken, dear. There is no failure when you are doing your best. You may not be producing the result that you expected. But your effort is producing a result of its own, which, in the providence of God, may be better than the one you intend. Don't you remember how Browning put it?

> "Not on the vulgar mass
> Called work must sentence pass,
> Things done that took the eye and had the price;
>
> . . . . . .
>
> But all the world's coarse thumb
> And finger failed to plumb,
> So passed in making up the main account:
> All instincts immature,
> All purposes unsure,
> That weighed not as his work, yet swelled the man's amount:
> Thoughts hardly to be packed
> Into a narrow act,
> Fancies that broke through language and escaped:
> All I could never be,
> All, men ignored in me,
> This I was worth to God, whose wheel the pitcher shaped.

"To God, my dear, the ideal is the real, the intentional is the actual. Thoughts must be things to Him, and purposes nobly striven for credited for deeds done, or else men are being mocked who dream in marble but must build in mud, think in gold but must give in brass, feel in scarlet but must act in fustian. But I like to think that it is with us as with David, when he was disappointed in building the temple, and God comforted him by telling him, 'Thou didest well that it was in thine heart.' Don't get to thinking in ultimate terms too quickly about life, my dear. There are not so many finalities in life as you young folks think. Remember the old saying, 'Man's periods are God's commas.'"



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